

VZCZCXR08417

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RUEHLM RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHBW #1362/01 2782213
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 052213Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1554
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 001362

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E.O. 12958:N/A
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SUBJECT: NAZIS AND VOJVODINA

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Leaders from Serbia's Vojvodina told the Ambassador that the appearance of a Nazi Movement in the province was a reflection of the changes in the delicate balance of the multi-ethnic, autonomous province as a result of the population migrations in the 1990's. Demographic changes enabled extremists on both sides of the political spectrum to undermine tolerance and support for democratic values, they said, suggesting that local groups were subject to infiltration and manipulation of outsiders. They also raised concerns that alleged efforts of the Serbian Government to centralize authority threatened both Vojvodina's autonomy and democracy in Serbia, as a whole. Officials dismissed press speculation of a rift between Novi Sad's mayor and the Radical Party, which she helped found. For now, Vojvodina's democratic forces are hanging on. End Summary.

Nationalists, Extremists, and Neo-Nazis

¶2. (U) The Ambassador visited Vojvodina province October 7 where he met with the democratic spectrum of the province's politicians. The most dire development was an emergence and growing popularity of a Nazi Party. The Nazi Party is scheduled to hold a demonstration October 7.

¶3. (SBU) Nenad Canak, LSV founder and National Assembly MP, said nationalists in the Serbian Government, particularly within the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), used Vojvodina extremists as a tool to consolidate their power. He noted that this was not a new phenomenon and that he had observed the rise of extremism throughout Serbia prior to every election. Canak said the GOS nationalists secretly supported local neo-Nazi groups planning a rally on October

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7 in Vojvodina's capital, Novi Sad. (Although the police denied permission for the event, the organizer has announced his intention to hold the rally in a different location in the city, and a second neo-Nazi group is seeking permission to hold a similar rally on the same day.)

¶5. (SBU) Putting local events into a broader context, Canak said outsiders hoped to portray Vojvodina as a contest between fascists and separatists in order to justify greater central control or, worse, to destabilize the country. Neo-Nazis targeted Novi Sad because of its tradition of multi-culturalism. Nationalists manipulated the neo-Nazis, in the name of Serb national unity, to counter the province's purported anti-Serb autonomy. Canak told the Ambassador that he would hold an anti-fascist rally the same day as the neo-Nazi rally, to counter this image and to demonstrate that most citizens in Vojvodina supported tolerance and autonomy, not separatism or fascism, and that people could peacefully coexist in multi-ethnic areas.

Hanging onto Multi-Ethnic Principles

¶ 16. (SBU) Bojan Kostres, President of the Vojvodina Assembly and a Vice-President of the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats (LSV), said that Vojvodina remained multi-ethnic, but he worried about the changing political values of the local population. Kostres attributed the growth of extreme nationalism in part to the influx of Serb refugees from the republics of the former Yugoslavia who had

settled in the province since the 1990s. He estimated between 150,000 and 300,000 urban, educated people had left the province during the same period. The current population was, he said, less civic-minded and, with few opportunities to travel outside Serbia, isolated from foreign democratic influences. Despite these challenges, Vojvodina maintained its strong tradition of democracy and tolerance, Kostres and others assured the Ambassador. Tamas Korhecz, a member of the Vojvodina Executive Council and a senior party official in the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM), said Vojvodina's multi-culturalism and adherence to rule of law were advantages for the province and provided a model for the rest of the country. As an example of the province's progressiveness, he described an Executive Council project to educate Vojvodina youth, the aim of which was to present multi-culturalism as excellence.

Centralization Threatening Vojvodina's Autonomy

¶ 17. (SBU) Kostres, Korhecz, and Canak commented on Belgrade's stranglehold on local government, highlighting specifically central control of all public land, taxation authority, and judicial appointments. Kostres said Vojvodina's leaders were trying to regain elements of autonomy that the province had lost during the Milosevic era and had only a short window of opportunity to do so. He worried that nationalists would react to Kosovo independence by limiting or even eliminating Vojvodina's autonomy, to head off any independence movement in the North. Korhecz said that such restrictions would be anti-democratic. Vojvodina's autonomy was currently unique in the country, but municipalities everywhere could

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benefit from increased local authority, he said.

Novi Sad's Radical Mayor still Radical

¶ 18. (SBU) Counteracting recent media portrayal of Novi Sad's Mayor Maja Gojkovic as something of a maverick Radical Party (SRS) member, Canak told the Ambassador that the ambitious SRS founder remained a party faithful, despite attempts by Canak and others to drive a wedge between her and the SRS. He said Gojkovic had only spoken out against the neo-Nazi rally because the SRS did not want to be identified with fascism.

Comment

¶ 19. (SBU) Assurances from the province's leaders that Vojvodina's unique atmosphere of tolerance and multi-culturalism persists was reassuring. However, the province clearly faces challenges that do not bode well for the country as a whole, particularly after the resolution of Kosovo, when the electorate will be most susceptible to messages of hate in the name of Serbian unity. End Comment.

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